

## AWAKENING OF THE SWAMP

(from VHSB #10, 1959)

by Roger H. deRageot\*  
VHS, Norfolk, Va.

The Dismal Swamp was awakening. There was a mixture of strange soft yellow and mottled light green which began to cover the trees and was reflected in the amber-colored water. April was painting the swampland, imparting to the scene the qualities of an abstract canvas.

The fine droplets of the spring rain fell gently and rhythmically upon the Great Swamp, splashing upon new leaves that had just sprung from their buds. The delicate trout-lilies freshly displayed their ephemeral blooms.

The redwings no longer banded together. The shrill calls of the small chorus frogs and the bell-like notes of the spring peepers gradually increased in number and intensity until they reached the peak of their voluminous and rhythmic tempo. The may-apple, whose tender green leaves had, for some weeks, dotted the forest floor were now blooming. The swamp jack-in-the-pulpits, which had already pierced the leaf-mold carpet, were still reaching heavenward.

The world of the tiny beings of the black water was teeming with new  
\*Past President of VHS.

energy. The turtles have already been sunning on their favorite logs. At dusk, the treefrogs spoke mysteriously - their call low, yet penetrating, and in the wide distances of the wastes, the echoes sounded stranger still.

During the warm hours, the watersnakes and cottonmouths come out to sun themselves along the bank of the ditches and lakes within the vastness of the swamp. The watersnakes bask generally on the low branches of trees overhanging the water--the cottonmouths bask on logs at shore level. On the rootlets of the fountain moss where they had been deposited in early March, were the eggs of the Many-lined Salamander. The small larvae were well advanced now and could be seen twisting around in the eggs' transparent envelopes. White egrets and night herons were busy carrying sticks to their nesting sites. High above the great lake, two downy white eaglets had hatched on the large platform of branches and sticks at the top of the great pine where a pair of bald eagles raised their family each year.

As one glanced at the outline of the cypress along

the water's edge silhouetted against the crimson sunset and heard the breeze murmur softly in the tops of the trees, one was glad that spring had returned with its new cycle of life to the Great Dismal Swamp. RHR

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Modern civilization has made inroads into the Great Dismal Swamp and no one seems to know what to do about it -- or whether anything ought to be done at all. A number of writers have called attention to the way the swampland is being "drained, bulldozed, and dissected." In POTOMAC magazine, a supplement to the Washington(DC) POST, for August 17, 1969, Mrs Mildred M. Payne of Charlottesville, Va., called attention to the soul-wrenching plight of Great Dismal, with photographs by Mr. Douglas Chevalier.

Mrs. Payne opened her account with: "Another wilderness is dying, but this time there's a difference. This 750-square-mile tangle of loveliness will probably be cleared, subdivided, and paved before most people find out it ever existed, because the Great Dismal Swamp is the stepchild of the conservation movement. (over)

DISMAL SWAMP, cont'd:

VHS members who were present at meetings in the Norfolk area will recall Roger deRageot's talks on the Dismal Swamp and viewing a film on its various creatures and plants. Our good friend Roger covered the many concepts through which conservationists hoped to save the Great Dismal for posterity.

Ben H. Bolen, Commissioner of Parks, Virginia Dept. of Conservation and Economic Development, lead a 1964 study commission that recommended acquiring 51,000 acres for \$1 1/4 million to be set aside

as a State park or a wild-life management area. In April 1968, the Va. General Assembly appropriated \$50,000 (4% of the amount) for conservation of the Great Dismal Swamp.

Frederic Heutte, former superintendent of parks, Norfolk, has a plan for developing Dismal Swamp that would preserve its character. U.S. Route No. 17, which parallels the Dismal Swamp Canal, would be doubled with two lanes on either side making a 22-mile reflecting basin in the center. The edges would be banked with the

region's flowering trees and shrubs: magnolia, jasmine, myrtle, lilac, and azaleas. A network of canals winding through the swamp would permit visitors to enjoy the variety of plants and animal life in relative comfort and safety.

There may come a time, not too distant, hopefully, when people will realize that the Great Dismal's contribution is in doing what it does best: being a swamp; a unique freshwater swamp. Its value in this capacity may be realized before it is forever lost to mankind.

"ECOLOGY" -- IS THE NAME OF THE GAME!

(Excerpted from a book review by Thomas E. Noyes, in the Evening Star, (D.C.) for February 27, 1970.)

". . . the major purpose of 'SINCE SILENT SPRING' (by Frank Graham, Jr., published by Houghton Mifflin Co. 333 pp. (1970) \$6.95) has already been accomplished.

Sometime...between the book's conception and its publication, a mass conversion to the new-found religion of ecology has taken place. It is now the all-purpose political issue. Every politician is for an end to pollution. The only contest is the scramble to see who can outdo the other fellow in condemnation of the polluters. And, at the moment, the one political voice that counts the most

-- that of the President of the United States -- is leading the chorus.

Salvation of the planet is not the only concern of the office-seekers. Pollution now ranks as the most universally unpopular product of mankind since the 1929 depression. It is the No. 1 whipping boy of the establishment. It has been taken up by youth as a new club to wield against the preceding generations who have left a partially poisoned planet as their legacy.

So it is hardly necessary to be told, once again, how stupid we have been, how blindly industry and the government plunged into deadly chemical warfare against unwanted insects and plants without stopping to think of the effect of the persistent

poisons on other forms of life. We know all that by now. We have had it - up to here - in news stories, telecasts, editorials, presidential messages, congressional hearings, and cover stories in every major news magazine. We the people, have heard all the horror stories, we believe them and we are demanding that something be done before it's too late..... But even though the rush of events has already pushed the public past the goal to which Graham (author) points, it shouldn't be assumed that the book is a waste of time or has nothing to say. The book should be required reading for anyone who is seriously concerned about the broad problems of pollution . . . You!.."

(A Book for Today)

OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THREE  
RARE AMPHIBIANS IN SURRY CO.

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By: Roger H. deRageot, with  
Andy Damalas, Tony Gibbon, and  
Barry Fox; Naturalist Staff of  
Pipsico Scout Reservation, the  
Tidewater Area Council, BSA.

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Geographically situated in the  
lower Piedmont, the topography  
of SURRY County, Va., presents  
an aspect of barely noticeable  
rolling hills. The forest,  
which covers 80 to 85 percent  
of the county, is principally  
a hardwood climax forest show-  
ing some affinity for the  
southern woodland with some of  
the Appalachian influence  
very noticeable in the flora.

The forest is on high ground  
frequently intersected by deep  
ravines and crossed by clear  
running streams, generally  
having sandy bottoms. Swamps  
may be encountered on lower  
land, but do not cover any ap-  
preciable area. Sizable cyp-  
ress ponds may be seen along  
the shores of the James River,  
probably the result of over-  
flow during periods of high  
water. Hickories: shagbark,  
Bitternut, and Mockernut; Oaks:  
Northern red, Black, Southern  
red, Blackjack, Swamp white,  
Chestnut-oak, Post, and White  
oak; Tulip trees, Sassafras,  
Sweetgum, Black gum, Flowering  
dogwood, Redbud, Hop hornbeam,  
American beech, Sourwood, white  
ash, and Black locust, form the  
principal cover - with oaks  
sweet gum, tuliptrees, and red  
maples predominating. Conifers:  
Loblolly pine, Virginia pine,  
and Eastern red cedar are com-  
mon but rather loosely inter-  
spersed throughout the hard-  
wood forest. Sumacs: smooth,

and dwarf, are much in eviden-  
ce along roads and other open-  
ings where trees have been cut.  
Several sizable pine barrens  
are situated in the county, one  
being near the entrance of the  
Pipsico Scout Reservation.

The summer of 1969 was charac-  
terized by an unusual amount  
of heavy rainfall which facili-  
tated collecting and observing  
a great number of species of  
reptiles and amphibians.

This period of heavy rains was  
culminated, during late July  
and early August, with rains  
of near deluge proportions. On  
August 3d, Eastern Spadefoots  
(Scaphiophis h. holbrooki) us-  
ually rather scarce and hard  
to collect, appeared in vast  
numbers and congregated  
around temporary puddles over  
all areas of SURRY County, ob-  
served by the authors. They  
were heard vocalizing and many  
pairs were mating. On the  
same night (Aug. 3), a large  
treefrog was seen on the road  
while driving two miles NE of  
the Pipsico Scout Reservation.  
Upon investigation, it was  
identified as a large male  
Barking Treefrog (Hyla gratio-  
sa). The time of capture was  
10:30 p.m., and the specimen  
was in a flat position, motion-  
less on the asphalt. On Aug-  
ust 4th, on the cleared land  
below a power transmissionline,  
situated between the secondary  
road going around the Scout  
camps and Virginia Route # Ten,  
a characteristic whistle of  
the Oak Toad (Bufo quercicus)  
was heard. A prompt and ener-  
getic search was organized and  
the small toad was discovered  
calling from a clump of grass

RARE AMPHIBIANS (SURRY)\_cont'd:

while submerged. This Oak Toad was captured 5 miles SE of the Pipsico Scout Reservation. The time of capture was 11:00 p.m. Another Oak Toad was calling from a flooded field two miles SE of the Scout camps at 11:30 p.m. (The specimen was not captured until Aug. 5th when it was heard calling at 9:30 p.m.). This small Oak Toad was calling from a cultivated field overgrown by weeds and various grasses and covered by 2 feet of water.

On the same night (Aug. 4) following about 3 weeks of almost uninterrupted rain, around 11:30 p.m., a chorus of approximately 12 Little Grass Frogs (Limnaeodius ocularis) was heard above the cacaphony of Hylid and Ranid frogs. The weak cricket-like chirp was hardly audible above the din. After persistent effort, wading in water almost waist deep, the triumphant moment came when two Little Grass Frogs were captured following an hour of arduous search. One was calling while sitting on the leaves of a very small red maple, an overhanging leaf was hiding the specimen from view. The second specimen was clinging to the stems of grasses. Both were calling from just above the water's surface. The call of the two specimens captured echoed and skipped over the surface of the water. As a result, it was exceedingly difficult to tell where the calls were coming from. This made this tiny batrachian -- already hard to find because size and color -- extremely difficult to collect. Other anurans which were chorusing in the same area were: Gray

treefrog (Hyla versicolor); Pine Woods Treefrog (Hyla femoralis); Squirrel Treefrog (H. squirella); Eastern Narrow-mouthed Toad (Gastrophryne c. carolinensis); Green Frogs (Rana clamitans melanota); Southern Leopard Frog (Rana pipiens sphenoccephala); Southern Cricket Frog (Acris g. gryllus); and Brimley's Chorus Frog (Pseudacris brimleyi). Spring Peepers (Hyla c. crucifer) were collected but not heard. Immature Green Treefrogs (H. cinerea) recently transformed from the tadpole stage, were observed, as were mating pairs of Pine Woods Treefrogs (H. femoralis). The habitat which supported this great variety of amphibian life was a ditch overgrown with sedges and various species of grasses. It is situated at the edge of a hardwood swamp. The authors wish to note here that the continual rain which fell on August 4, assumed the characteristics of a warm tropical storm, and the temperature of the water was noticeably higher than usual.

On August 5, warm tropical rains continued. At 10:00 p.m. two male Barking Treefrogs (H. gratiosa) were heard vocalizing several hundred feet from the road. They were unwary and easily located. The constant rain abated somewhat on August 6, and by mid-day the clouds had dissipated and the sun appeared for the first time in many days. An excursion was made to the location where the two Barking Treefrogs were collected the day before. A chorus of approximately twelve  
(continued at top of next page)

RARE AMPHIBIANS, (SURRY) cont'd:

Barking Treefrogs were heard calling. The very typical notes rose above those of the Green frogs, Southern Leopard Frogs, and Squirrel Treefrogs. The Barking Treefrogs, unlike the Squirrel Treefrogs, were wary, rather hard to approach, and calling while submerged. Five large adults were collected. The peak of the chorus was 9:30 p.m. and was 1½ miles SE of the Pipsico Scout Reservation on the Eastover Farm. The habitat, a pond approximately 2 yds. in circumference, well overgrown with weeds and grass, was surrounded by black willow and eastern red cedar, though somewhat isolated and in an open field. Heavy forests of hardwood trees are situated on each side, several hundred yards from the pond.

The temperature of the water was rather cold, and the water level about 3 feet deep. (The authors wish to note here that following a day of clear sunny weather on August 6, there was a sharp decline in both the atmospheric and water temperatures immediately after sunset.) Neither Oak Toad voices nor Little Grass Frog chirps were heard after the night of Aug. 5. All areas mentioned were under the authors' surveillance until August 10th. On August 10, at 8:30 p.m. a chorus of Barking Treefrogs was heard far in the distance SE of Spring Grove, Va. No effort was made to locate it. On August 7-8, rather large numbers of Eastern Spadefoots were observed in many temporary ponds and mud puddles.

Conclusions: W. Leslie Burger\* (1961) was the first herpetologist to report the presence of the Oak Toad, Little Grass Frog, and Barking Treefrog

from the State of Virginia. Burger reported the presence of these species from Littleton, in SUSSEX County, Va., and, with a few exceptions, his first collections remain among the few evidences of their presence in the "Old Dominion".

We are happy to be able to add information regarding these three elusive species in this State. The addition of a new county more definitely establishes them in a new big range extension. The discovery, in SURRY County, Va., is logical, as SUSSEX County is one of the adjoining counties to the South. Certainly, we take pleasure in adding to the list of Virginia amphibian records - the largest and possibly most attractive of the North American treefrogs, the smallest of North American land vertebrates, and the most diminutive of the true toads.

We feel certain that under the best field conditions, such as warm rain, early spring, etc., many more of these elusive amphibians will turn up in the Southeastern counties of this State. We tend to agree with Burger that these three immigrated by what he describes as the "stenohaline route"; i.e., an environment in which the salinity level varies only very slightly - if at all. RHR

\*W. Leslie Burger was the second president of VHS and is at Franklin College of Indiana...

\*Roger H. deRageot, third president of VHS, spent the past summer as Nature Director for the Pipsico Scout Reservation, Tidewater Area Council, BSA, at Spring Grove, SURRY County, Va. (For an earlier survey: VHSE#40.)

HERPETOLOGY COURSE TO BE  
GIVEN AT MOUNTAIN LAKE  
BIOLOGICAL STATION IN VA.

The Mountain Lake Biological Station, University of Virginia, will offer during the coming summer a course in herpetology to be taught by Dr. Harry G.M. JOPSON, Professor of Biology<sup>+</sup> at Bridgewater College, Bridgewater, Va.

The following description of the course was excerpted from a U.of Va. program:

ZOOLOGY 204: Herpetology.

The biology of amphibians and reptiles. The herpetofauna of the southern Appalachians is rich, particularly in respect to the salamanders. Fieldwork is done in the vicinity of the station and also at other significant places. A considerable number of species can be expected to be encountered in the field or the laboratory.

A research project is to be conducted by students as a part of the course. A dissecting microscope is required. Texts: Introduction to Herpetology by Goin and Goin, and Blair's Vertebrates of the U.S. The course is being given in the first term, June 11 through July 14, only. .

Other courses are offered.

During the second term, July 16 through August 18, a course will be offered in mammalogy, as follows:  
ZOOLOGY 207: Mammalogy..

This course combines-- field and laboratory work, lectures, and student seminars. Distribution, ecology, and population variation of the small mammal fauna of Mountain Lake studied in the field. Lectures and seminars consider natural history, systematics, classification, and morphology of mammals of the world. Dissecting microscope required. Text: Introduction to Mammalogy (Cockrum). The course is taught by Dr. Charles O. HANDLEY, Jr., Curator in Charge, Division of Mammals, U.S.National Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560

REGISTRATION: - - - - -

While the courses are designed for graduate students, primarily, it will be possible for anyone with a background of general biology to register for them.

Each course has a credit value of 6 semester-hours. Dr. J.J. Murray, Jr., VHS, and Dr. J.L. Riopel, are co-directors of the MLBS.

Admission to the courses is open to men and women of good academic standing who have a minimum of ten semester hours of college credit in biology. These courses at Mountain Lake, Pembroke, Va., are a part of the summer session of the University of Virginia.

Courses may be taken for graduate or undergraduate credit. Students who wish to apply these credits to U.of Va. graduate degrees must be admitted to graduate program at U.of Va. before enrollment. Write: Dean, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, U.of Va., Charlottesville, Va. 22903

Students from other universities planning transfer of credits for Mountain Lake courses should secure advance approval from their own college or university.

REQUEST ADDED INFORMATION from:

Director, Mountain Lake Biological Station, U. of Va., Charlottesville, Va. 22903

+ Dr. Harry G. M. JOPSON, vertebrate zoologist, is a charter member of VHS and President of VHS from 1966 through 1969.

SURRY COUNTY, VA.,  
SPECIMENS PLACED IN U.S.  
NATIONAL MUSEUM COLLECTION

SUSSEX COUNTY -  
SURRY COUNTY - -  
ADDED NOTE:

SCOTT COUNTY, VA.,  
HELLBENDERS, NEW IN  
NATIONAL COLLECTION

From Spring Grove, Va.:  
collected by deRageot and  
Damalas, et al. Aug. 1969:

Barking Treefrogs (3)  
(Hyla gratiosa)  
collected 3 Aug. 1969  
USNM #167,139

Spring Peepers (2)  
(Hyla c. crucifer)  
collected 4 Aug. 1969  
USNM #167,140.

Little Grass Frog (1)  
(Limnaeodius ocularis)  
collected 4 Aug. 1969  
USNM #167,141.

Oak Toad (1)  
(Bufo quercicus)  
collected 4 Aug. 1969  
USNM #167,142

An Eastern Cottonmouth, 44"  
(Agkistrodon p. piscivorus)  
was identified by Mr. C.C.  
Steirly, Waverly, Va., on  
31 July 1963 from old  
Spratley Mill Pond, 2 mi.  
N. of Dendron, SURRY Co.,  
Va. (See VHSB #34 page 4.)

Eastern Cottonmouth, 5'7",  
was killed in SUSSEX Coun-  
ty, Va., on 15 June 1968,  
along Moccasin Creek, a  
tributary of Blackwater  
River, by L. B. ("Lefty")  
Gregory of Rt. #1, Box 31,  
Spring Grove, Va., SURRY  
County. At the request of  
Mr. Roger H. deRageot, VHS,  
we have added Mr. Gregory  
to the VHS mailing list.

From Gate City, Va.:

Hellbender (2)  
(Cryptobranchus a. allegan-  
iensis) collected 11 Octo-  
ber 1969 by R.E. Jenkins,  
E.A. Lachner, and W. R.  
Taylor in Copper Creek,  
almost 3 miles NW of Gate  
City, Va. USNM #167,240.

Beginning in early 1967,  
the U.S. National Museum's  
Division of Reptiles and  
Amphibians has acknowledg-  
ed donations of Virginia  
material to the National  
Collection through the  
pages of the VHS Bulletin.

These specimens will be  
recorded on the VHS dis-  
tribution maps.

VHS MEMBERSHIP is recommended  
for those who are more than  
casually interested in the Va.  
herpetofauna. Dues \$1 a year..

Member's privileges include a  
card, free BULLETINS (all is-  
sues), and attendance at VHS  
meetings (occasional) at the  
option of the individual.

(detach)

To: VHS Treasurer  
2623 Military Road  
Arlington, Va. 22207

VHS Secretary  
4706 Tallahassee Ave.  
Rockville, Md. 20853

VHS MEMBERSHIP SUPPORTS: The VHS  
BULLETIN, Va. Herpetological Sur-  
vey activity. VHS is not a club,  
or a social organization. It is  
not a hobby group. VHS promotes  
efforts in the field and biology  
laboratory of small teams. VHS  
is a science-information activity.

VHS dues, after June 30, - \$2 a yr.

(detach)

(With a check or money order for  
\$1.00 enclosed - - send no cash!)

(Please start my subscription to  
VHS Bulletin with VHSB # \_\_\_\_.)  
(Insert No. of your last rec'd.)

LETTERS, COMMENTS, IDEAS:

VHS SOMETIMES QUIESCENT ?

Postcard from Roanoke VHS member: "What happened to the VHS BULLETINS? WOW! I haven't received any for six months!" . . . . .

Another from Richmond, Va. . . . thought I'd drop you a note to remind you that I haven't received those VHS Bulletins yet! . . . ." This material is the only link I have with VHS, since I work and attend college on a full-time basis. . . . .

(EDITOR'S NOTE:) VHS Bulletins Nos. 61 and 62 were mailed in late 1969; additional 1969 Bulletins will be out in early 1970.

HOW can YOU Help ? EASY!

If you have not joined or renewed your VHS membership,, please do so today. Use the form which you will find at the bottom of page seven VHSB#63.

We will carry your communication in the next available issue of VHSB.

Of all the Virginia herpetofauna I am particularly interested in the turtles of the genus Clemmys. I have read that the Wood Turtle (Clemmys insculpta) is protected in certain States. How about Va ?

According to Conant's FIELD GUIDE TO REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS (1958) the Bog Turtle range extends to NE Virginia. Do you have actual records of it from here ?

Could you possibly supply me with any available information on the genus Clemmys, particularly the Bog Turtle, in Virginia?

Stephen Behme  
6802 Lemon Rd.  
McLean, Va. 22101

(Editor's note:) Advised that the Bog Turtle is on the "endangered species" list, but that the Wood Turtle, while rare, isn't. Can anyone set the record straight ? (N.B. Dr. Barton!)

Please renew membership, and keep address up to date.

I have read some back Bulletins of the Virginia Herpetological Society and found them to be both educational and interesting. I have become interested in collecting over the past year. Mr. Edward Acuna and I have been on several field trips: on the (Lower) Peninsula, No. Carolina, and Pennsylvania. . . . We were fortunate enough to collect a Canebrake Rattlesnake and a Copperhead on the Peninsula which Mr. R. Edward Goetz (Hampton) exhibited at the fair in YORK County. My wife and I have 3 harmless snakes in terrariums, (and) 3 local turtles. Sincerely,

Robert A. Wicksnes  
7 Wellington Drive  
Hampton, Va. 23366

(Goetz, Wickanes, and Acuna were at the National Zoo meeting in December. Need the address for member in school on the West Coast.)

(cut along dotted line VHS membership application-renewal form on back)